1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33)1936 SR9 Carib SR9,

621 627 182 exist at present. In this region a hunting, fishing, and agricultural life restricts the size of the group and isolates it. Only a small group with a wide territory about it can exist, if the people are to have sufficient animal food. Furthermore, the available crop-raising soil in any one spot will support only a small population, because of the fact that cassava requires a drained sandy loam, a type of soil which is found only in small and widely scattered areas in the jungle. This soil, even when located, will, however, produce only two good crops, after which the field must be abandoned and a new one cut, making the disposition of the fields and the membership of any given settlement unstable. Even the term of existence of the settlement itself is usually limited. Hunting operations as carried on here also make for social instability and individuality, because hunting can be done most successfully by one man and seldom in parties of more than four. It is also often necessary for a man to be away from home for several days following game, and since whenever possible a Carib takes his wife and children with him when he is away over night, this factor also contributes to the looseness of the established group.

177 621 Even so, it seems that a stronger organization than the present was formerly maintained for purposes of war and defense. Since the early part of the nineteenth century, however, the European political control of the colony has succeeded in repressing inter-tribal warfare. With their cultural background, therefore, the Caribs have found environmental conditions and exterior political conditions unfavorable to the development of political power and group solidarity. As a consequence, I think, legal, judicial, and penal institutions which otherwise would support such a solidarity, show little formal development.

RELIGION

● 776 **Supernatural Beings.** The Carib world is jointly inhabited by human beings and a number of supernatural powers. There are two kinds of supernatural beings, spirits and ghosts. The former are independent beings or powers, the latter represent the souls of dead human beings. (Spirit, akuru; ghost, yumbupa akasang.) The supernatural beings of the first class, which we will call spirits, inhabit the land, the water, the air, and at some time

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or another may be associated with practically every natural and man-made object in the universe. The average layman is wary lest he trespass upon the rights of the spirits or displease them in other ways, but he is often rather hazy as to their attributes and powers. In regard to higher spiritual affairs the layman is as a rule required to take a negative attitude, for generally speaking, his positive pleas and requests to the most powerful spirits can be conveyed only through the medium of a piaiyen (medicine man or priest) or an aremi emu (magician or sorcerer).

In charge of the whole universe is a sort of literary diety, whose name is not known even to the piaiyen. This supreme being is so remote from the life of men that his characteristics are only indefinitely known and are little discussed. He is the supreme power or creator, the first cause, as it were. The priests do not pretend to be able to talk with this head spirit as they can with certain of the lesser supernatural beings; they have never seen him or had any personal dealings with him. He is called iopotari akuru ("boss spirit") and it is insisted that he "fixed everything," that he got the universe started, and even, it seems, had dealings with human beings in remote times. In one of the myths we have the story of the primeval contest, or race, between the several species of animals, heavenly bodies, and so forth, a competition which was arranged by the iopotari akuru as a method of judging the attributes of various things so that they could be assigned to their rightful places in the scheme of the universe. In another myth it is said that a long time ago, this spirit called the people to come to him in the bush. One man of the group he took with him into the forest and changed this man into the appearance of a typical bush spirit, or epo, that is, a being with a long thin body covered with hair, equipped with projecting brow ridges, and devoid of an anus. The humans were naturally alarmed when the man returned. So when the spirit called them to come again they refused. This vexed the head spirit, and ever since that time certain bush spirits under his direction, called epos, have seized and eaten human beings whenever they have had the opportunity.

The head spirit is also, for instance, responsible for the moon and the stars. The nature of these celestial bodies is unknown to the Indians, but the fact that they are believed to have been included in the primeval competitive race suggests an animistic

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776 identification. Once the heavenly bodies were started in the race,
773 they could not stop. Ever since that remarkable event, the stars and moon have continued in their endless flight about the sky, and the creator spirit has now fixed them there in the celestial steeplechase forever. Regarding the phases of the moon, it is believed that the creator spirit causes it to swell and deflate itself in regular periods so that men may keep track of time as it passes.

776 Little more seems to be known concerning the head spirit. He is remote, but at the same time all pervading. On the whole he is beneficent, but he, like other spirits, is given to phases of anger, as shown by the incident involving the transformation of the man into spirit guise.

The creator spirit is assisted by a chief lieutenant who is called Komanakoto, a name which is also applied to the original medicine man, although it is insisted that there is no identity. Komanakoto acts as the managing executive of the universe, devoting more attention to detail than does the supreme spirit. But he is also far removed from the affairs of men in these days, despite the fact that it is possible for a medicine man who has become well acquainted with all the other spirits in the pantheon to succeed in establishing contact with him. This, however, is possible only for a medicine man of long and successful experience.

It is obvious that the ideas of the Caribs regarding a supreme being are poorly developed and impersonal, but there seems little reason to suspect that the rudimentary notions which we have just described are in any way due to Christian influence, for in
[177] general they seem to agree with the beliefs held by the Guiana Indians in the earliest records.[1] Gumilla, for instance, speaking of the Caribs of the Orinoco, says, "The Caribs call God Quiyumocon, i.e. Our Big Father, but it is not sufficiently clear whether they mean by this expression the First Cause or the most ancient of their ancestors." [2]

On the Barama I have been unable to find agreement with Roth's statement, apparently concerning the Pomeroon Carib, that "the present-day British Guiana Carib name for God is . . .

[1] Roth, 1915, *An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk Lore of the Guiana Indians*, p. 117, "The native tribes of Guiana had no idea of a Supreme Being in the modern conception of the term."

[2] Gumilla, 1791, *Historia natura del Rio Orinoco*, quoted in Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 117.

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Tamosi-Kabutana, Old Man-Sky (Kabu-the Sun)."[1] Nor do the Barama Caribs worship, so far as could be discovered, the Sun or the Moon, as is said to have been the custom among earlier Carib groups.[2]

Indefiniteness concerning the name of the supreme being has been encountered by other investigators, for instance, Roth, who remarks, "It is very noteworthy that . . . discrepancy as to the alleged word for God is at once apparent in almost all the Creation myths of the other tribes that so far I have managed to unearth."[3]

In our collection of myths, which constitutes the following section, will be found explanations of the origins of certain things, particularly in Myths 1, 2, 3, and 13. But no well elaborated or comprehensive origin myth was forthcoming from informants on the Barama. Aside from the myths just mentioned, no allusions to the beginning of things were ever made, and the recitation by the investigator of origin myths from other Carib tribes elicited no response. On the Barama the name Lonquo or Longwo, the alleged First Man of the Island Carib, is unknown. According to La Borde, "Lonquo was the first man and a Carib. He was not made of any other body; he descended from the sky and lived a long time on earth. He had a large nostril from which, as also from an incision in his thighs, he produced the first men."[4] Roth alludes to Bolingbroke's description of Longwo as the first man in the Indian belief of the "central parts," of British Guiana.[5] No elements of this belief were found on the Barama, and recitations of the story were met with interest, but also with professions of ignorance. Nor do the Barama Caribs attribute their origin to descent from "tigers," as reported from the Achagua by Gumilla.[6]

In short, the Barama Caribs leave the question of ultimate origins entirely in the hands of the great creator spirit, and bother their heads little concerning the details.

When we turn, however, to a consideration of the more specialized spirits of nature, we find that the Barama Caribs have well

[1] Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 118. Incidentally, the Barama Carib name for sun is wuyu.

[2] "It is known that the Chaimas, Cumanagotos, Tamanacs, and other original tribes of the Carib people, worshipped the Sun and Moon," Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 118.

[3] Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 118.

[4] *La Borde*, 1856, *History of the Origin, Customs, Religion, Wars, and Travels of the Caribs*, pp. 226–228.

[5] Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 141.

[6] Gumilla, 1791, *Historia natura del Rio Orinoco*, p. 113, quoted in Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 143.

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776 defined beliefs. The affairs of the natural world are under the direct, although not comprehensive, charge of five classes of spirits, which are directly approachable by the medicine men. Each of these five classes or orders of spirits is believed to be related to an original or major spirit in somewhat the same way that a human family is related to its major ancestor. Piyumari is the generalized land spirit particularly associated with the forest and is regarded as more or less benevolent. Masi is the spirit of the air, regarded as omnipresent, as a spirit which sees and knows everything, and which on the whole is looked upon with some disfavor by the medicine men who find him intractable and hard to deal with, and by laymen who say that he does more harm than good. Lakai Akani is the spirit of the waters, the creeks, and rivers. Ume is the spirit of the hills. Mawari is concerned with many miscellaneous affairs such as houses, sickness, industries.

Each of the five names mentioned is associated not only with an individual supernatural being, but also with a class or order of spirits. Thus Piyumari, for instance, is the name of the chief spirit of the order bearing the name of Piyumari, which has the land and forest under control. All the spirits in a given class are equal, all represent without distinction the power pertaining to the class of spirits to which they belong. Each is equally powerful in much the same way as we think of all the members of a monastic order, for instance, as theoretically possessing equal holiness.

776 823 791 Each of these orders of spirits is represented by a stone of a distinctive color or texture: blackish stone (basalt or gabbro) for Piyumari, quartz for Masi, rough sandstone for Ume, greenish jadeite (?) for Makai Abani, and limestone for Mawari. A piaiyen, as will be described in more detail later, during the course of his career becomes familiar with a varying number of spirits depending upon his success. The spirits with which he can regularly establish communion are represented by small pebbles or pieces of stone enclosed in his maraka or rattle. Thus, a piaiyen who is able to work only with Piyumari and Masi will have only black stones and quartz in his rattle. When a neophyte completes his training for piai under an established medicine man, his teacher presents him with two stones representing respectively an individual of one of the above classes of spirits and that individual spirit's wife. It is believed that if the spirits are satisfied in their

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association with a piaiyen, they will breed and multiply, so that as time goes on an original pair of stones will be increased to a large number, each one representing a spirit of the class to which its parents belong. Additional spirits are always useful to a medicine man, as they increase his importance by being available for errands and tasks which he can assign to them.

The spirits with whom a piaiyen is in contact are not believed to live in the rattle at all times, but leave some of their essence in the material form of the stones enclosed in the rattle. Spirits are believed to live in the same way as men in settlements in the bush, hunting, sleeping, making merry, but remaining invisible. Their settlements are not always identifiable, but open spaces in the forest are often pointed out as the clearings of certain settlements of spirits. Thus, an open space caused by the fall of several trees in a high wind is said to have been made for the purpose of habitation by the bush spirits, and consequently is avoided by men. If only one tree has fallen, it is believed that the spirits started to make a clearing and changed their minds. The water spirits are thought to live in settlements under the surfaces of the streams. Thus the Caribs, who have no anthropomorphic idols, nevertheless pay a sort of respect to these stones contained in piaiyen's rattles and believed to represent certain spirits.

In addition to the five classes of natural spirits just mentioned, there are a number of other types of spiritual beings whose connections with the five major classes are more or less indefinite.

The akatombo[1] are regarded as malevolent or mischievous beings who are forever present, waiting to make trouble. Medicine men do not keep these spirits under their control. They come of their own accord to medicine men who chase them away. The sorcerers, however, are more hospitable and sometimes have dealings with this class of spiritual being.

The tiger[2] spirit class is called ashushi. There are a number of different kinds of tiger spirits, just as there are a number of species of tigers in the bush. Other spirits are in fear of tiger spirits in the same way that men are afraid of actual tigers. Consequently, a

[1] Cf. Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, pp. 152–153, "The mainland Caribs term a person's shadow *ai-akaru*, and the spirit resident in this head, his Dream Spirit *aka* or *akari*; but after the latter leaves the body for the forest permanently, it is known as *aka-tomba* (*sic*)." The Barama Caribs repeatedly rejected this identification, insisting that the ghost was called yumbupa akasang.

[2] "Tiger" is the creole designation of any wild member of the cat family. True tigers, of course, are not native to the Western Hemisphere, but since the term is used in much of the literature, it is employed here.

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piaiyen usually has contact with one or more tiger spirits, who may be used by him to discipline the less ferocious spirits of his circle. The tiger spirits are believed to be the ghosts of dead tigers. All other animals also have spirits, which become ghosts upon their death. Boba root is used by the hunter as a protection against the spirit of any animal he may have killed. For instance, if he has killed a tiger or any other animal which has a dangerous spirit, he scrapes the roots of the boba tree and makes a salve which he puts on his skin. Then he crawls under the buttressed roots of any large tree. The boba salve is believed to entangle the spirit of the dead animal so that it can do no harm to the hunter. In crawling under the roots, the hunter scrapes the spirit off himself. Animals are also amenable to the machinations of spirits of beings and orders in addition to the tiger spirit. Thus, a dog that barks in its sleep is believed to be suffering from the interference of spirits. However, the only way in which a member of one of the five major classes of nature spirits can be killed (i.e. removed from interference in worldly affairs) is by being devoured by a tiger spirit.

Each cassava field is watched over by a spirit of the cassava called Piuku. The precise connection between this being and the Ume or hill spirits, is not clear. It is believed that each hill in the bush is under the care of a group of Ume, who after the field is cut and cultivated, apparently abdicate in favor of the Piuku. The Ume live in a settlement of their own under the hill, which serves as a roof. The Piuku is not a member of the Ume order, but nevertheless it is not unfriendly toward the Ume. An abandoned field reverts to the Ume spirits, and in the rare cases of fields without cassava no Piuku is present. It is not believed, on the other hand, that each separate cassava plant has a spirit of its own, nor are the other plants of the field associated with spirits. Piuku is thus a sort of agricultural deity especially associated with cassava plants. Concerning the manifestations of the Piuku to human beings, an informant said, "Once my wife and I were digging cassava in a field. Nearby I hear a groaning m'm'm'm. I do not know what it is so I go to the piaiyen and he says it is the Piuku." Another informant said, "The piaiyen told me the Piuku is like a big white man big head, broad shoulders. Has a white skin covered with shiny buttons, but wears no clothes," a belief which is obviously acculturated.

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However, each tree in the bush is believed to have a spirit of its own (wiwi akuru: tree spirit) which must be placated when the tree is cut. When cutting a field, care is taken to pour a mouthful of cassiri on each stump. In return for this mark of respect the spirit formerly inhabiting the tree may remain in the vicinity, exercising a benevolent supervision of its old location until it finds a young sapling in which to take up its residence, or it may leave immediately for a new residence. If an offering is not made, the spirit of the felled tree will lurk about in an angry mood and bring trouble to the crops. Adolphus Tony, the headman at Parapimai settlement, says that he often hears the spirit of a large felled tree talking. It sounds like a man speaking at a distance.

A man must not sell a korial (dug-out canoe) immediately after he has finished building it because the spirit of the tree from which it is made will become vexed and cause the craft to warp or crack. However, if a proper offering is made when the tree, from which a korial is to be built, is felled, the spirit of the tree will come to the builder in his dreams and show him how to make the korial successfully. When a man finally does sell one, he places the goods which he received for it on the stump of the tree for a night. In one case, at least, the payment was even placed on the stump of a korial tree when I rented a korial from an owner for a month. No ceremonial, however, attends the actual construction of a korial.

When a bow is made, an offering must be left on the stump of the tree from which it was cut. If, however, the weapon is made from a fallen tree which has no visible stump, no offering is necessary because it is believed that the spirit is already gone.

The silk cotton tree (*Bombax* sp.) is distinguished from other trees by the fact that it harbors a number of spirits, including a special being which lives only in silk cotton trees (kumaka akuru). Other trees, with one exception, have only one spirit attached to each. When questioned, the Caribs reply simply that the silk cotton tree has a number of spirits because it is the biggest tree in the bush. Caribs refuse to cut down the silk cotton tree. The generally stated opinion is that this deference to the tree is due to the hardness of its wood, which breaks axes used to chop it. David of Sawari said that the axes were broken because of the strength of the spirits in the trees. MacDonald of Powis Hill sug-

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824 776 gested that even if one succeeded in felling a silk cotton tree, it would be impossible to placate the many spirits in it. Concerning the parallel with West Africa in regard to the beliefs about this tree, Roth says, "the superstitions concerning (this) have been incorrectly surmised as communicated from the negroes to the Indians. . . . The superstitions of the *Bombax* were cherished in Middle America long before the arrival of the negroes: the Mayas of Yucatan spoke of it as the Tree of Creation, etc. under whose shade the spirit of mortals reposed."[1]

Another plant which possesses plural spirits is the washine, a species of bush rope which twines around the trunk of a host tree, completely hiding the latter, which usually dies and rots, leaving the washine standing upright with a hollow tube where the trunk of the host originally stood. The washine is thought of as a "strong" plant, inasmuch as it is thus able to strangle full grown trees, and it may be on account of its strength that it is credited with more than the usual single spirit.

It is related that "in old times" the people were being killed by the tree spirits which were then visible. They used to come and kill people by hitting them on the head with a sort of adze-like claw. People built fires under the trees and smoked out the spirits. The latter could be heard sneezing and coughing in the branches of the trees. The young spirits fell down and were clubbed to death by the people. Then the trees fell down and the older spirits escaped in the smoke. Since that time the tree spirits have been invisible. Originally they looked somewhat like people, although they had the peculiar type of claw mentioned above. Tree spirits were not covered with hair as are epos.

[791] It is said that a piaiyen who wishes to do harm to an enemy can talk with the spirits of certain trees which, when the individual in question is near enough, will cause their trees to fall over on him. This is, of course, an animistic rationalization of accidental deaths caused by falling trees.

776 The stream spirits or Makai Abani may be divided into those which inhabit the creeks and those which live in the rivers. The latter are sometimes specially designated as tona kanoko (water inhabitants). The creek spirits are thought of as being lesser members of the family which includes all the stream spirits. There is

[1] Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 229.

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one spirit for each creek and one head spirit for each river. The number of lesser spirits inhabiting each stream depends upon its size. It might be thought that the head spirit of the Barama River would receive special veneration, but I could find no evidence that this was the case. It is considered good, when reaching a part of the river on which one has not travelled before, to dip up some of the river water in the hand and allow a few drops to fall in the eyes. In this way one establishes communion with the river spirits of the new region. There seems to be little ritual connected with the river spirits which can be practised by laymen. Drowning and accidents on the river, as well as shortage of fish, are attributed to the displeasure of the river spirits, who may be propitiated by the piaiyen.

Each human settlement has its own spirit which exercises supervision of the people and houses. The house spirit is said to live in the houses like the human inhabitants. When people are away, a stranger chancing upon the settlement can sometimes hear the spirits talking among themselves. These house and settlement spirits seem to do little either of harm or good if they are well treated. However, when the construction of a house is completed, the owner holds a spree and scatters some of the drink on the floor as an offering to the house spirit before offering any to the guests. This function does not have to be performed by the piaiyen.

Lines and trails have no special spirits, although they are under the jurisdiction of the bush spirits who happen to be operating in their vicinity.

We have yet to describe the epos,[1] grotesque beings which figure in the folk tales and which are to be met by travellers in the bush. They are said to be recognizable by the long dank hair which covers their whole bodies. Under the hair, the body of an epo is extremely thin, so thin that the waist may be surrounded by a man's hand. They have heavy superorbital ridges, a peculiarity which prevents them from seeing anything above them. When climbing a tree, for instance, an epo is forced to climb up head downward so that he can see where he is going. They are also distinguished in their lack of either buttocks or anus, and occasionally, it is said, the anal region is occupied by a bed of red hot

[1] Apparently the same beings which in certain other tribes are designated as hebus. See Roth, 1915, *Animism and Folk Lore*, p. 173.

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776 coals, which enables human beings to locate the epos in the night time. There is little evidence to show that in the Barama country the epos are associated with natural species or features of the environment in the same way in which, for instance, the tree spirits are. They seem to be free spirits of the bush, bent for the most part upon mischief. And from the point of view of holiness, they seem to occupy the lowest rank in the order of Carib supernatural beings. They alone can be seen and conversed with by laymen, and their nearness to ordinary mortals decreases the amount of respect paid to them in comparison with other spirits. A man may match his wits with an epo with a good chance of emerging the winner. As illustrated in Myths 7 and 8, men may sometimes play very uncomfortable tricks upon them. Thus the epos are the clowns of the Carib pantheon, spirits with whom men may carry on a good-natured, though serious, competition in the bush.

Certain other supernatural forces remain to be discussed later under the head of magic.

775 **Ghosts and Death Customs.** In addition to the spirits described above, which lead an independent existence, a second class of supernatural beings is concerned to a certain degree in the affairs of mortal men, namely the ghosts of human beings.

764 322 When an individual has died the body is dressed in the person's best raiment and ornaments. A coffin is made of wood. Informants agree that the use of a wooden coffin is an ancient custom and that it has not been introduced by missionaries or other outsiders.[1] The coffin is most often made of upaiya wood (unidentified). [824] Some informants say that upaiya wood is used exclusively for this purpose, and that coffins are made of no other. Others say that any wood or an old korial may be used. In cases where the coffin is made especially for the purpose, that is, when an old korial is not used, it is made of a tree trunk hollowed by the same process used in making a korial or a cassiri barrel. It is provided with a lid of wood, and the inside is lined with fresh leaves. A grave three to four feet deep is dug in the floor of the house occupied by 764 the deceased (grave: munano). Burial takes place usually within twenty-four hours after death, although in some cases it is postponed until the second day. In former times, it is said, the sur-

[1] Two negro prospectors who died during my stay in the area were buried in shallow graves without coffins.